

Washington, DC – Faith leaders are speaking out in support of Congressman Earl Blumenauer's (D-Ore) work to improve end of life care consultation, which is a bipartisan provision he included in the health care reform legislation, *America's Affordable Health Choices Act* (H.R. 3200).

The provision provides seniors with better care by extending Medicare coverage to cover the cost of patients voluntarily speaking with their doctors about their values and preferences about health care services. There is a wealth of research demonstrating that a simple conversation between patients and their doctors can help reduce stress and anxiety of patients and their families, ensure that patient wishes and goals guide treatment decisions, and improve patient and caregiver satisfaction.

This bipartisan provision has support from a diverse coalition like AARP, the American College of Physicians, the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, and Catholic health systems.

Following are statements from faith leaders in support of Blumenauer's work:

"NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, supports provisions in H.R. 3200 that allow Medicare to pay doctors for patient visits when the patient has requested a visit to talk about advanced directives for care. This policy promotes clear communication in families and helps to ensure that everyone is aware of a patient's wishes. The anti-healthcare reform advocates have latched onto this provision in order to spread lies and fear among vulnerable populations. This tactic is wrong and must be countered. As Pope Benedict XIV said in his recent encyclical, there is an "urgent need for reform in the face of great problems of injustice in the development of people, it calls for courageous action to be taken without delay." In the face of the injustice for more than 45 million people in our nation who do not have access to any healthcare, there is an urgent need for reform. Lies and distortions have no place in the dialogue about the change. As the Pope notes, only truth can be the anchor of any real change. NETWORK supports the truth of families talking together about a loved one's end of life wishes. This is a family value that should be supported, not demonized."

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS

Executive Director, NETWORK National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

"Giving patients the opportunity on a regular basis to discuss with their physicians the values and choices they want to inform health care decisions is an important component of good medical care. This is good for doctors who want to provide the best care for their patients, for families when they must make difficult decisions about loved ones, and for patients who want their religious values and moral perspectives respected."

Rev. John H. Thomas

General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ

"The fact that medical science has advanced so far as to allow more sophisticated interventions, even in terminal conditions, does not mean that each patient would choose all such interventions. While many patients have filed "living wills" to set out their wishes as they approach the end of life, it is not always possible for patients to anticipate changes in their health status or in medical treatments for their conditions. Authorizing consultations for patients with their physician about the range of options available to them at all stages of care is a sensible and respectful measure – one that preserves the dignity and individuality of the whole person. We are distressed that some detractors are mischaracterizing this simple and sensible provision. It certainly does not coerce or limit individual patient's choices in any way. It does, on the other hand, put the patient at the center of her or his care, through all the stages of life."

Joe Volk

Executive Secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker organization

"Reflection about the end of life, including elements in medical care, is important for all of us. Such discernment and discussion with loved ones can be enhanced by conversations with thoughtful and caring physicians. Actual decisions are always our own informed by our values and moral perspectives."

□ **Msgr. Charles J. Fahey**

"The Supportive Care Coalition is a nationwide collaborative of 20 Catholic health care organizations that assists Catholic health ministries in addressing the physical, emotional, psychosocial and spiritual needs of those suffering from life-threatening and chronic illness, as well as those approaching the end of life. We have long supported measures that improve palliative care and end-of-life services, eliminate barriers and build a more connected health care experience across the continuum of care. Central to achieving patient-centered, quality care is strong communication between patients and their health care providers and for these reasons, we strongly support the advance care planning provisions in H.R. 3200."

Sister Karin Dufault, SP, PhD, RN

Executive Director, Supportive Care Coalition: Pursuing Excellence in Palliative Care

"When serious illness strikes, someone other than the patient – often the family – can be asked to make major health care decisions. Research shows that loved ones usually don't know what kind of care the patient wants, which causes much distress. Formalizing a way for patients to have a voluntary discussion with their physician about advance care planning is an important way to improve Medicare. Patients should have the care they actually want and loved ones should have advance guidance on these choices. This is an integral part of the Catholic practice of faith. Catholic moral life teachings includes planning for and making difficult decisions about treatment, and followers are encouraged to have conversations such as those described in HR 3200."

Rev. John F. Tuohey, PhD

Director, Providence Center for Health Care Ethics

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Media Contact: Erin Allweiss

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202-225-4813 Office/202-446-8265 Cell

Erin.Allweiss@mail.house.gov

